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FREACH TEACH: A COMPUTER-BASED SYSTEM FOR TEACHING ADVERTISING MEDIA PLANNING

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ABSTRACT

This paper describes a computer-based learning system, designed to teach media planning. The system consists of a case study, combined with a decision-support system through which students can practice applying the advanced analytical tools that might be discussed in the course. In addition to describing the system, the paper will discuss the system's performance in a beta test at a major mid-western university.

INTRODUCTION

Ever since the early days of quantitative media analysis in the late 1950s, media planning theorists have sought to harness the power of computers in service of their craft. As early as the 1960s, media planners began to develop computer-based models for evaluating the quality of alternative media schedules (see Gensch 1973 for a review). These models have become increasingly popular over the years, first with the advent of on-line media research service bureaus such as IMS and TELMAR, and later, with the increasing power and versatility of desk-top computers.

Most of the computer-based media models were developed as decision support systems, designed to help media planners make more efficient selections of media. However, media models have also found their way into the area of training and development. For instance, Lancaster and Katz (1985) and Martin and Coons (1996) have developed media planning simulations that enable students to evaluate the distributional characteristics of the plans they have developed as part of media planning exercises. Cannon, McGowan and Yoon (1995) suggest a method for incorporating "single-source" data into educational simulations. Cannon, Leckenby and Abernethy (1996) describe a design for incorporating a broad range of planning effects into educational simulations.

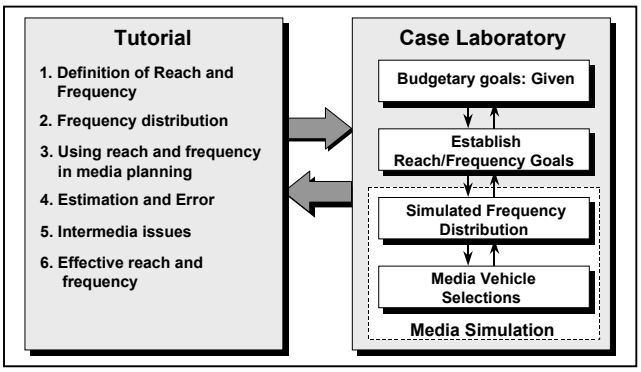
The purpose of this paper is to describe FReach, a computer-based learning system for teaching media planning. The system includes a specific case, accompanied by a computer-based decision support system for working through the various theoretical issues facing planners in a practical media planning situation.

THE OBJECTIVES AND STRUCTURE OF THE FREACH MODEL

The underlying concepts of media planning are relatively simple. At the level of individual media vehicles, Gensch (1970, 1973) identifies six factors, beyond the obvious criteria of cost per exposure: *editorial climate*, *product fit*, *technical capabilities*, *competitive advertising strategy*, *target population deceptiveness* and *product distribution system*. Aaker (1975) reduces these to three: *segmentation* or *targeting*, *media vehicle effectiveness*, and *media option effects*. In practice, media option effects can be combined, by treating each vehicle/option combination as if it were a separate vehicle. Thus, Cannon, Leckenby and Abernethy (1996) reduce the factors to two: *targeting* and *media vehicle effectiveness*, where targeting is expressed in terms of the proportion of the target market being reached (the *target market rating*) and the media vehicle effectiveness is expressed in terms of the proportion of the people being reached who are effectively exposed to the advertising message (*advertising exposure rate*).

In practice, a media plan will generally contain several different vehicles, and multiple insertions within any given media vehicle. The effect of this combination is generally expressed in terms of a frequency distribution. Ultimately, the key to media planning rests in knowing how to construct and evaluate a frequency distribution.

EXHIBIT 1:
THE STRUCTURE OF THE FREACH TEACHING SYSTEM



The FReach system is designed to do this. It seeks to teach students the basic of media planning, from the establishment of media objectives, to the crafting of a media plan to achieve these objectives, to the selection of media vehicles to fit the plan. Embedded in the process is the underlying notion of frequency distribution. Exhibit 1 depicts the structure of the actual FReach learning system. It consists of two major components: A *tutorial* and *case laboratory*.

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